



US Men's Handball Wins Silver

By Donald Tropp
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The U.S. men's handball team traveled to Melbourne, Australia to compete in the 2005 Deaflympics. The team consisted of only eleven players, guided by Coach Lynn Ray Boren, a two-time Deaflympian. There were five teams, and the format was round robin with a playoff. After all games were played, the last-place team would be eliminated, leaving four teams to battle for the gold. The other four countries involved in handball competition were Croatia, Germany, Denmark, and Taipei.

The team trained at Ballarat University for one week before the Deaflympics. It marked the first time in Deaflympics history that the U.S. trained in the host country prior to the Deaflympics. Boren said, "It was a great opportunity to develop as a team before going to Melbourne. We were able to focus in a laid-back town like Ballarat."

The U.S. played its first game against Croatia, the defending champion, and lost 26-34. The U.S. committed 11 turnovers in the first half, and Croatia capitalized on them. Croatia was on top of its transition game as the U.S. showed it was weak in getting back on defense. The U.S. won the second half, but it was not good enough to overcome the first half. Nonetheless, Boren said it was a tremendous learning experience for the players. Left wing Stefan Bergan led all scorers with eight goals.

The following day, the U.S. competed against Germany, losing 19-25. The U.S. led at halftime and maintained its lead until 24 minutes into the second half. They were unable to score as the drought lasted 17 minutes. Unable to produce on offense, the U.S. saw its lead evaporate as Germany grabbed the lead late in the game. It was the first time in Deaflympics history that Germany defeated the U.S. in handball. Bergan and right back Jesse Woosley accounted for most of the offense, scoring a combined 13 goals.

After an off day, the U.S. played Denmark and recorded its first victory of the Deaflympics, winning 27-24. Boren said, "The fact that we executed very well on offense was important to controlling the game. The team felt very confident afterward especially since Denmark beat the U.S. by one goal in the 2003 America Cup." It was the first international victory for the rookies. Goalie and co-captain Tyrone Kovacs had 17 saves, and Woosley had 8 goals to lead all scorers.

The U.S. beat Taipei 40-28 the next day, improving to 2-2. It was a high-scoring game, and Boren applauded Taipei, who played in its first Deaflympics, for refusing to quit. "Taipei played hard until the clock ran out. They were stubborn and didn't know what giving up meant," Boren said. Taipei's tallest player was only 6'2 as opposed to the 6'8 left back Steve Biskupiak, the tallest player for the U.S. Size was an advantage for the U.S., who also capitalized on its fast breaks. Kovacs turned in another superb effort, recording 18 saves, while Bergan led all scorers with 10 goals. Left wing Sean Moore stepped up his game, contributing 8 goals, and center back Donald Tropp added 7 more. The U.S. clinched the number three seed in the playoffs and was scheduled to play Germany in the semifinal.

The U.S. sought payback after its loss to Germany earlier in the Deaflympics and got it, beating Germany 24-22. Boren credited the win in large part to the tight defense played by Woosley, Moore, and defensive specialist Joseph Kolcun and the 13 saves by Kovacs. At one point, the U.S. was up 8 goals, but nearly squandered its lead late in the game. The U.S. saw its lead dwindle to one goal with two minutes left in the game. Right back Norman Chan made a beautiful move, blowing by his man and scoring to cushion the lead to two goals. Germany never threatened again, and the U.S. advanced to the championship game against Croatia. It was Chan's best offensive output as he had five goals. For the second consecutive game, Bergan scored in double figures, recording ten goals.

The game was very close during the first twelve minutes with each team matching each other goal for goal. But Croatia eventually pulled away and led by 5 at halftime even though their top scorer was injured early in the game. He left the game and never returned. But this may have provided the spark Croatia needed, for their offense overwhelmed the U.S. They had 43 goals as opposed to U.S.'s 26, showing that they can score at will. Woosley produced 10 goals while Bergan had six.

Bergan finished with 45 goals to lead the team, and Woosley was second with 36. The U.S. won silver, despite the fact that the squad returned only four veterans and added new players. It was the team's best finish ever. Boren was very pleased with the outcome, noting that the team was in its rebuilding stage and shocked the world when it won the silver. "It was inspiring to see my boys on the podium at the medal ceremony," Boren said. "All the hard work and dedication paid off." All players have verbally committed to returning to the Deaflympics in 2009 in Taipei, but Boren will hold clinics and tryouts in the future for those who are interested.

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